

## THE HOME GUARD

The public face of civilian defence was the Home Guard or Local Defence Volunteers.

The Home Guard began in May 1940 when civilian men between the ages of 17 and 65 were asked to join up.

The willing volunteers had to make do with a motley collection of uniforms and equipment, arming themselves with ancient rifles from museums, farms and private collections.

Eventually, around 2 million men had signed up and took part in drill, weapons practice and military exercises, the idea being that the Home Guard would confront German invaders in the street.

The Home Guard's work, however, involved tedious manning of look-outs and guns.

Individual experiences varied enormously, often depending on how seriously the "officers" took their roles and exercised their authority.

The Home Guard was disbanded in November 1944, when any prospect of a German invasion had waned, which was, perhaps, just as well, because when the Allied armies thundered across Germany they found an army made up of elderly men and boys which offered little resistance.

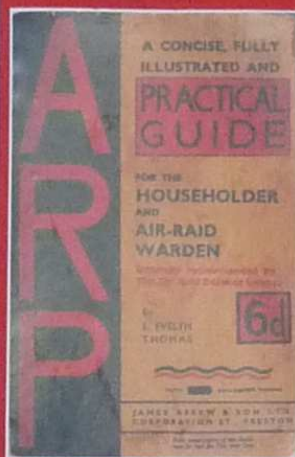


Members of the Home Guard learning how to operate a machine gun

There were also FIRE GUARDS and FIRE WATCHERS, who worked closely with the ARP Wardens.



Part of the Auxiliary Fire Service in practice



## THE AIR-RAID PRECAUTIONS

The ARP was created in April 1937 and recruited around 200,000 volunteers to be Air-raid Wardens. It was organised by the Government and delivered by local authorities.

The wardens' main purpose was to help resist attack from the air by patrolling streets during the black-out to ensure no light was visible and to report the extent of bomb damage.

If a light was spotted, the warden would alert the person responsible, shouting "Put that light out" or "Cover that window".

They were also responsible for handing out gas masks and Anderson and Morrison shelters.

There were eventually around 1.4 million ARP wardens in Britain, mostly part-time volunteers who had full-time day jobs.



*in a raid -*

Do not rush, take cover quietly, then others will do the same.

They were issued with helmets with a large W in the front and navy blue boiler suits.

Wardens' Posts were built with specialist equipment such as anti-gas gloves, eye-shields and curtains, whistles, hand bells and rattles and First Aid boxes.



Rehearsals at a decontamination centre for gas victims.

## GAS MASKS

By September 1939 some 38 million gas masks had been given out, house to house, to families, because there was a very real fear that Nazi bombers would drop poison gas bombs.

They came in cardboard boxes with a shoulder strap and everyone had to carry their mask at all times. Adult gas masks were black. Children's were coloured to make them less frightening, with red rubber pieces and bright eye piece rims. Babies' masks totally enclosed the baby and air would have had to be pumped into the mask with a hand-pump.

They were never to be needed.



Babies were an awkward shape for gas masks and had to be fitted with a grotesque-looking helmet, which had a carrying handle at the top